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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [NATO](#) [EUN](#) [FI](#)
SUBJECT: A CLEAR CHANGE OF TONE: FINNISH FOREIGN MINISTER
KEEN ON IMPROVING TRANS-ATLANTIC RELATIONS

REF: HELSINKI 321

Classified By: PolChief Greg Thome, Reasons 1.5 (b) (d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Foreign Minister Kanerva underscored to Ambassador Ware the new GOF's intention to improve the US-Finnish bilateral relationship, and he highlighted the shared foreign policy challenges the US and the EU face in Russia. The Ambassador urged more Finnish funding for peacekeeping operations (PKO). She also encouraged Kanerva to use his June meeting with the Secretary to describe exactly how Finland intends to become more involved in NATO and in collaborating with the US to implement the Freedom Agenda in Russia and the new neighborhood. END SUMMARY.

A Strong NATO is Key to a Strong EU

¶2. (SBU) On May 11, Ambassador Ware made her first call on Finland's new Foreign Minister, Ilkka Kanerva. Kanerva opened by highlighting trans-Atlantic relations and the new GOF's attitude toward NATO. While there are no specific bilateral problems, he said, the GOF is committed to improving the tone and promoting "the vital nature of the Finnish-USA relationship." The Ambassador thanked Kanerva for helping set a new tone for the relationship, noting that it was already evident. She added that when differences of opinion did arise, she welcomed addressing those frankly and openly, but via diplomatic channels -- not through the press. Kanerva discretely acknowledged the allusion to his predecessor, and wholeheartedly concurred.

¶3. (SBU) Within the context of the new GOF's focus on improved trans-Atlantic relations, Kanerva said that civilian and military crisis management (CM) are a key component. EU and NATO CM efforts must complement one another, he continued, because for the EU to be strong and promote its values in Europe and beyond, it depends on collaboration with NATO. Although not a NATO member, Finland can and will take a more active role in promoting EU-NATO collaboration, he added. Kanerva then established a clean break from the previous government, stating clearly that "we do not intend to hide our NATO agenda. We will discuss it." He welcomed the Ambassador's arguments in favor of increased annual CM budgets to allow for more Finnish peacekeepers in the field, and he also noted that the GOF intends to join the Strategic Airlift Consortium.

A Shared Challenge: Russia

¶4. (C) Turning to our shared foreign policy challenges, Kanerva said good relations with Russia were an imperative for Finland. However, Moscow's recent behavior toward Estonia and Kosovo made this difficult, and EU-Russia relations had clearly become strained. Kanerva underscored the GOF's solidarity with Tallinn during the Bronze Statue crisis and reminded us of his public calls for a joint EU policy response to Russia's heavy-handed tactics. He also

referred with some dismay to the strange letter Russian FM Lavrov sent to several EU foreign ministers, describing it as "unsophisticated" and inappropriately worded. Clearly, he added, the GOF did not agree with Lavrov's version of events. Likewise, the GOF shares US concerns about Russia's response in Kosovo and the likelihood that Moscow will veto a UNSCR on final status. Kanerva and the Ambassador agreed that the Secretary's visit to Moscow and the EU-Russia Summit -- both scheduled for the week of May 14 -- offered important opportunities for the US and the EU to send a unified message to Russia on these and other issues of concern.

A Clear Finnish Agenda for June Bilateral

15. (SBU) Regarding Kanerva's scheduled June bilateral with the Secretary, the Ambassador urged him to present a clear agenda as to how Finland can show leadership in bolstering trans-Atlantic relations; in enhancing crisis management; and in collaborating with the US to implement the Freedom Agenda. Highlighting the new GOF's plans to join the NATO Response Force (NRF) and the Strategic Air Consortium would be a good start, as would confirmation of plans to eventually take leadership of a PRT in Afghanistan. But of equal importance would some type of Finnish roadmap regarding how the GOF can work with the US to promote democracy and transformation in Russia, Belarus, or the Balkans. Kanerva acknowledged that Finland played this kind of role in the Baltic states prior to their joining the EU, and assured us that he would go to Washington with an agenda to share.

WARE